

Pan Pacific Conference Proceedings

JOB CALLING, WORK IDENTITY AND JOB CRAFTING: A THEORETICAL PAPER

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ABSTRACT

Many employees are seeking meaning and purpose in their working lives. Some perceive that they have a calling, a pull to do work that serves a greater purpose for others and society. Individuals across different kinds of occupations may perceive that they have a calling. This job calling may lead some employees to enact strategies such as job crafting, which is manipulating the job demands and job resources in their work to enhance their work identities and to live out their job calling or be closely aligned to it in their work. Thus the purpose of this theoretical paper is to propose that job crafting strategies such as increasing the structural and social resources in one's job may lead to higher work identification and a possible closer alignment to one's calling. Likewise increasing the challenging demands and decreasing the hindering demands in one's job may also lead also to higher work identification and a closer alignment to actualizing one's calling. Recommendations are then made on further studies on the relationships of job calling, job crafting and work identity. Implications for employees, management and HR are also highlighted.

INTRODUCTION

Man either views his work as a job (to fulfil his or her financial needs), as a career (to obtain occupational advancement) and/ or as a calling (to fulfill a higher purpose such as meeting a societal need) [1]. The latter has received considerable research attention in organizational studies [2][3] over the last couple of years, even though calling was previously a construct studied mainly through religious studies. [4]. Calling which is defined as "work in which one's lives one's purpose" [5] is shown to be an important work life aspect of people across different levels and occupations [6]. It is not just associated with individuals who work in religious institutions. Calling is associated with experiences of meaning and is becoming a key motivational driver or orientation in the lives of people. "Man's search for meaning" as originally coined from Victor Frankl [7] is being reiterated in boardrooms, offices and factories all across the world. There is a greater drive towards experiencing spirituality in the workplace, thus a greater emphasis on finding and living one's calling [8]. Although studies on job calling have shown that it is related to occupational identity and meaning [9], none have examined how people may potentially utilize job crafting strategies to enable them

to live out their calling. The purpose of this paper is then to propose that some individuals may aim to align themselves closely to their callings, so as to actualize it through proactive behavior such as job crafting, which may lead to the enhancement of their work identities. Firstly literature on job calling, work identity and job crafting is presented and thereafter a discussion follows on how the four job crafting strategies can be used to build work identities in the aim of living out a calling.

JOB CALLING

Calling is defined as "a transcendent summons, experienced as originating beyond the self, to approach a particular life role in a manner oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness and that holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation" (p. 427) [10]. Furthermore, calling has been delineated into perceiving a calling and living a calling [11]. Perceiving a calling relates to whether an employee feels that they have a calling to their current kind of work or career. Living a calling on the other hand relates to more on whether an individual perceives that they are currently living out their calling in their lives and work [12]. Furthermore it has been argued that people who live out their calling experience a deeper sense of purpose and meaning in their lives [13] [14] which consequently leads to greater job and life satisfaction [15]. For this reason the important role that calling may have on employees should be noted. What is also particularly highlighted in the literature, is how people who perceive and live out their calling see that they have a duty to help others [16], even in jobs that may seem as demeaning or unlikely in society such as funeral undertakers or cleaners [17]. Some workers for example like zookeepers may be willing to sacrifice a lot of themselves and their needs so that a need in society can be met [18]. Studies on calling have also shown how it is related to occupational identity (a facet of work identity) [19], work engagement [20] and career commitment [21].

WORK IDENTITY

Work identity is how individuals identify with the different facets of their work such as their occupational groupings, the organization that they work for, the type of tasks that they do and how central work is to their lives. It has been defined as "...a work-based self-concept, constituted of a combination of organisational,

occupational, and other identities that shapes the roles a person adopts and the corresponding ways he or she behaves when performing his or her work” (p. 2) [22]. It is also defined as a “...a multi-identity, multi-faceted and multi-layered construction of the self (in which the self-concept fulfils a core, integrative function), that shapes the roles individuals are involved in, within their employment context.” (p. 31) [23]. Work identity is shown to consist of three dimensions which are work centrality, person-organization fit and value congruence [24]. Further studies have also examined how specific job demands such as overload and specific job resources such as organizational support and advancement opportunities may predict work identity [25]. Consequently work identity is built through the interplay of job characteristics (job demands and job resources) with an individual’s dispositions [26]. What is further known and discussed in the next section, is how individual employees play around or manipulate the respective job demands and resources within their work to attain higher work identity levels. This is accomplished through job crafting [27]. Work identity is also known to predict work engagement [28].

JOB CRAFTING

Job crafting, an individual job redesign activity is described “as the physical and cognitive changes individuals make in the task or relational boundaries of their work” (p. 179) [29]. A later definition of job crafting by [30] defines it as the “proactive employee behavior consisting of seeking resources, seeking challenges, and reducing demands” (p. 1122) [31]. This definition was built on the job demands and job resources model [32]. The Job Demands Resources (JD-R) model was developed by [33]. Job demands refer “...those physical, social, psychological, or organizational aspects of a job that require sustained physical and/or psychological effort on the part of the employee and are therefore associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs” (p. 501) [34]. Job resources on the otherhand are “...those physical, psychological, social or organizational aspects of a job that either/or (1) reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs; (2) are functional in achieving work goals; and (3) stimulate personal growth, learning and development” (p. 501) [35]. In later studies on job crafting, it was established that it has four job crafting dimensions, two of which are job resources and two which are job demands. Job resources are divided into structural (such as skill variety and autonomy) and social resources (such as social support and feedback) [36]. Employees will seek to increase these two different resources as they craft. Job demands are divided into challenging demands (such as taking on extra tasks) and hindering job demands (such as making work less mentally and emotionally intense). Employees will seek to increase challenging demands, and decrease the hindering demands as they craft. The crafting process enables employees to enhance their sense of wellbeing [37]. Job

crafting is also regarded as means by which people enhance their work identities [38].

LIVING OUT OR ALIGNING ONESELF TO ONE’S CALLING AND WORK IDENTITY BY MEANS OF JOB CRAFTING

As stated earlier, recent studies on job crafting reveal that employees use four different strategies to craft their jobs.

One such strategy is that of increasing structural job resources by for example taking up more training opportunities, and seeking higher levels of autonomy in their jobs [39]. Increasing structural resources through crafting brings about more structural resources and is shown to elevate levels of wellbeing such as work engagement [40]. This finding is highly significant for the building up of work identity. As employees grow in their respective work roles they may seek to increase more structural resources that would enable them identify more strongly with certain aspects of their work in which they derive a greater sense of purpose. This becomes even more crucial when a person links their calling to their career or work [41], it is then assumed that they would choose to increase those structural resources that would help to facilitate a closer navigation towards fulfilling a higher purpose or greater good for society. As structural resources such as learning opportunities increase, so does an employee’s professional identity increase [42]. Learning, development and autonomy, as well as skill variety also leads to an increase in the experience of meaning in one’s work [43], which may in turn lead to a greater sense of actualizing one’s calling, especially if an employee sees that as they gain more skills and knowledge that they are able to serve and help others better. Consequently growth opportunities was shown to predict work identity [44]. This is especially relevant when the skills learnt and opportunities gained help others in a meaningful and purposeful way.

Proposition 1: Increasing the structural resources in one’s job results in higher levels of work identity and may increase alignment towards one’s calling.

Employees may also craft their social resources that they have at their disposal in their jobs [45]. Social resources could include supervisor and peer support, feedback on performance, extending and helping others achieve their work-related goals [46]. These prosocial behaviours help to enhance the relational identities that employees have with others. An employee’s work identity is enacted and lived out through the various roles that an employee fulfils [46]. An employee may for example choose to increase his or her managerial responsibilities thus increasing his or her influence over more people with the sole purpose of wanting to help others. Helping others is considered a key motivation for striving to live out one’s calling [47]. Employees may also deliberately use networking or social lobbying [48] to establish relationships that may lead to

alternative avenues to live out their calling. As calling is considered something going “beyond the boundaries of one’s job” [49], some employees may even set up networks outside of their respective jobs to achieve set milestones that bring them closer to living their calling or dream or higher purpose for their lives. As an employee works on this through crafting, it is assumed that the professional or career identity of the individual is also simultaneously enhanced. This thus builds the individual’s work identity.

Proposition 2: Increasing the social resources in one’s job may lead to higher levels of work identity and an increase alignment towards one’s calling.

Another way in which employees craft their jobs is through increasing their challenging job demands [50]. Challenging job demands include taking on extra tasks, starting new projects, and getting involved in more projects than required [51]. Increasingly more organizations’ jobs or tasks are becoming automated in this digital age, so employees have to find novel ways to keep themselves engaged in their work. Multiskilling themselves may be an option to fulfil any job that is required and available and keeping abreast of current and future trends. Skill variety is a known motivator for employees [52]. Some employees may choose to do much more than their normal call of duty or work responsibility, so as to fulfil the greater strategy of the organization, especially if their values resonate greatly with the values of the organization [53]. With the increase drive for organisations to be more socially responsible, employees may be given more of themselves if they view these extra roles as a calling to make a difference in the lives of others [54]. Ultimately their work identity would be enhanced as they are not just contributing to themselves but also to a greater cause. Some jobs for example such as the work of policemen and soldiers require employees to be exposed to violence, physical danger and other human atrocities, but these employees may feel it is a calling to serve others this way [55].

Proposition 3: Increasing the challenging job demands in one’s job results in higher levels of work identity and an increase alignment towards one’s calling.

Employees crafting their jobs may also engage in the practice of decreasing their job demands, such as avoiding emotionally draining colleagues, ensuring that their work is not overly mentally taxing and difficult to do and manage [56]. As employees engage in this practice they experience a higher sense of control over their work, thus leading to a greater sense of wellbeing. This thus enhances their work identity. They may also find as they decrease the demands that burden them in their work roles, they may find more time to do tasks and projects in which they derive more purpose and meaning, which may be more aligned to their calling.

Proposition 4: Decreasing the hindering job demands in one’s job results in higher levels of work identity and an increase alignment towards one’s calling.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

It is recommended that these propositions on the possible relationship that job crafting, job calling and work identity may have with one another be tested empirically on different occupational groups and within different contexts.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EMPLOYEES, MANAGERS, ORGANISATIONS AND HR.

Organisations and managers can leverage the individual job design efforts of their employees by encouraging job crafting to maximize employee and team performance. Managers can implement job crafting learning interventions for their employees. They can also encourage more work discretion and participative decision-making practices in their workplaces [57]. HR should assist line managers to help create work environments that facilitate greater experiences of meaning and purpose for employees.

CONCLUSION

With the increase of people seeking meaning and purpose in the workplace, the issue of calling should take more prominence in HR and management decisions.

References will be made available upon request.